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SECRET CITY: HOW HOMOSEXUALITY SHAPED
POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN D.C.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good morning to those of you who are here with us in Washington.

Good afternoon and good evening to those of you who may be joining us virtually from other parts of the country and other parts of the world. I am Suzanne Maloney. I am vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution. And on behalf of Foreign Policy and on behalf of Brookings, it is my great pleasure to welcome you here today to this very special event to discuss a book by our friend and former Brookings colleague, Jamie Kirchick.

It's a New York Times bestseller, as you see here, "Secret City: The Hidden History of Gay Washington." "Secret City" is a deeply researched study of how homosexuality shaped successive presidential administrations in the 20th century. The book shines a particular spotlight on the price that so many individuals paid and the price that our country paid for the discrimination that so many Americans faced in attempting to serve their country, and how this loomed over Washington and over our politics and our foreign policy, ending promising careers and destroying reputations.

To generate this book, Jamie Kirchick utilized thousands of declassified documents, interviews with over 100 people, material unearthed from libraries and archives all around the country to record a dark and difficult time in American history when being gay or lesbian led to banishment from politics and society. The book calls our attention to the people who chose to serve our country and the ways in which they contributed to our public interest from a World War II era gay spymaster who pioneered the seduction as a tool of American espionage, to Sumner Welles, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's one-time Under Secretary of State. How often these politicians were betrayed once their sexuality was revealed.

As a New York Times review of the book wrote, "'Secret City' is a luxurious, slow-rolling Cadillac of a book, not to be mastered in a single sitting. It would be best read at the violet hour with a snifter of brandy in a wood-paneled library." The Guardian proclaimed that "throughout 'Secret City,' Kirchick does a masterful job of conveying the flavor of homophobia in each historical era, while using impeccable research to vividly characterize the dozens of individuals at play in these stories."

We have an embarrassment of riches here today to help us think about how this recent past can inform our approach to the future. Most importantly, we are joined by the author himself. Jamie,

congratulations on this monumental contribution to this historical literature into our policy debates today.

MR. KIRCHICK: Thank you.

MS. MALONEY: Jamie Kirchick, as you well know, is a widely published journalist. He's a columnist for *Tablet* and a frequent contributor to an array of publications including the L. A. Times, the Washington Post, Foreign Policy, and Commentary, among many others. He's the author of another very important book, a very timely book, "The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age." Most importantly, he spent five years with us here at Brookings while he was writing this book as a visiting fellow with our Center on the United States and Europe and with our project for International Order and Strategy here at Brookings.

We are also joined by our colleague, Jonathan Rauch. Jonathan is a senior fellow in the Governance Studies program here at Brookings and the author of eight books, including "Gay Marriage: Why it is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America," which was published in 2004, as well as many articles on public policy, culture, and government. In 2011, he won the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association prize for excellence in opinion writing.

We are also joined by Luke Schleusener, chief executive officer and cofounder of Out in National Security. He's held many roles in government, including serving on the speech writing staff of Secretaries of Defense Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel, and Ash Carter from 2012 to 2017. Earlier in his career, he worked in the White House Office of Presidential Personnel.

Briefly, before we begin our discussion, a final reminder that we're on the record today. We're also streaming live. And so, those who are viewing virtually, please send your questions via email to events@brookings.edu or on Twitter using the #SecretCity. For those in the room, we will reserve the last few moments of our conversation at the end of our event for questions and answers. Staff with microphones will come around to give you an opportunity to join the conversation.

One final note, I want to let you know that both Jonathan and Jamie's books are available in our bookstore if you happen to be here with us today or if you happen to be stopping by Brookings anytime soon. And we'll have a special for Jamie's book, a 20 percent discount for those of you who want to pick up a copy over at our bookstore. So, I encourage you to stop by on your way out today or if you happen to be in the Dupont Circle area.

So, let's get to the discussion. Jamie, I'd love to start with you and just ask you to give us a sense of what motivated the project and how you came to write this really tremendous book.

MR. KIRCHICK: Well, thank you, Suzanne, and thank you to Brookings. It's really great to be back here. As you mentioned, I did pretty much most of the research for this book and all of the writing of it while I was here at Brookings. It was a wonderful intellectual home. I also want to particularly thank the library staff who -- particularly Laura Mooney, who was just beyond amazing in all the work that she did helping me track down stuff that I thought was impossible to find. She did a great service.

So, I think the inspiration for this book was a sort of gradual process. And I think I was inspired originally maybe sort of subconsciously, I was a student at Yale, and I was taking a class with John Lewis Gaddis, who's the dean of Cold War studies. And I'd always been very interested in the Cold War. You can tell by the first book I wrote, and I worked at Radio Free Europe, one of these great Cold War institutions. And he was teaching a class on the history of -- sorry -- he was teaching a class on the art of biography because he's George Kennan's biographer.

And in that class, we had to choose a subject to write a paper about who's living or dead, as long as their papers were at Yale. And I chose Larry Kramer, who was a very fascinating, loud, occasionally obnoxious, but wonderful human being who was a AIDS activist. He was a playwright, a novelist. He had donated his papers to Yale. And I got to know Larry through that process, writing about him. And I think that was sort of the kind of merging of my two sort of intellectual interests. On the one hand sort of Cold War Washington political history, with the sort of untold history of gay people in America. Because what I realized when I was working on this book was that there was no worse secret in this town than being gay. It was even worse than being a communist.

And as a journalist and someone who wants to uncover new information, what could be a more fascinating topic, right, than this phenomenon, this thing, this unspeakable evil that was homosexuality. And this is a city that runs on secrets. Its secrecy, particularly in the 20th century when the concept of national security began to cohere, which really wasn't until World War II.

It's actually funny. I came across when I was doing the research for this book through the diary of FDR's naval aide, a man named John McCrea. And he was telling a story about walking. And this is like the late '30s, so before World War II. He's telling a story about walking near the White

House, and he sees a white paper flying through the air and he snatches it, and he looks at it. And it's a top secret -- it says, top Secret from the State Department. It had flown out the window of the -- the State Department used to be in the Old Executive Office Building now. This is the Office of State, War, and the Navy.

So, this is how secrets were handled in Washington before World War II. Literally, you know, top secret documents just fly out the window, right? And that's how secrets were viewed. And there wasn't this notion of national security, you know, in terms of security clearances. And there was no, you know, civilian intelligence agency. There was no CIA, right? And then World War II is what really transformed our nation in many ways. And one important way is the world of intelligence, but it also transformed our understanding of homosexuality.

Homosexuality went from being something that was, you know, merely a sin. It was crime in every state. It was condemned from every pulpit. And it was a medical condition. I mean, you could be sent to a mental institution. Saint Elizabeth's Hospital here was where people were sent, gay men and women. And they would suffer unspeakable medical torture and whatnot, lobotomies, castrations, and whatnot.

World War II transforms homosexuality. It turns it into this national security threat because the fear is that gay people because of this terrible, terrible secret that they could be blackmailed. So, this is a long-winded answer, but basically, it just seemed like a fascinating window through which to study this period of history.

MS. MALONEY: The book is really interesting on this paradox that you talk about that this sort of secrecy that individuals were forced to maintain around their private lives even as they managed some of the most sensitive issues within government. And can you talk a little bit more about this kind of paradox that, you know, sort of informed the culture and the experience of gay men and women who served at very high levels but often had to deal with paranoia, conspiracy theories, threats to their own personal safety as a result of the kind of obsession with these sorts of issues.

MR. KIRCHICK: One of the things I realized is that pretty much every president -- and the book spans FDR to Clinton -- almost every president had a very close whether aide or friend who was gay. And they usually knew about it, or they would find out at some point. And yet, it didn't impact, you

know, their view on whether or not this person could be retained, right?

So, I tell the story about Sumner Welles, the undersecretary of state for FDR who is sort of it's discovered that he is gay. And FDR really tries to protect him for a couple of years, but ultimately, he is forced to ask for his resignation. And then Dwight Eisenhower has a very close aide, Arthur Vandenberg, Jr., the son of the great senator from Michigan, Arthur Vandenberg, who J. Edgar Hoover, who, you know, is a whole -- that's a whole subject in and of itself -- J. Edgar Hoover discovers evidence that Vandenberg is gay, brings it to Eisenhower's attention, and like that he's gone.

Similarly, there are, you know, there are two aides to LBJ whose careers are cut short. One of the two men that I put in the book, they're both dead, so, I didn't really feel any kind of ethical quandaries with doing this, but, you know, Richard Nixon's chief speechwriter was a gay man. And yet, that didn't have any -- and he knew that. Richard Nixon knew that his chief speech writer was a gay man. We listened on the tapes, and I reproduced some of these conversations, the Nixon White House tapes. I mean, he's ranting about gays being responsible for the downfall of Rome and Greece and there are, you know, all these paranoid rants. And I think the biggest thing I discovered was just the sheer number of gay men, in particular, around the Reagans. And that, obviously, you know, it didn't have much impact on their policies when it came to the AIDS crisis.

So, it's really not until Bill Clinton where you actually see sort of openly gay people being welcomed and accepted in a presidential administration. And for this entire period of time, you know, the presidents they can count, you know, very close people among their gay people among their sort of coterie. But it doesn't have any impact on the public policies that, you know, led to this, that created this discrimination.

MS. MALONEY: I want to bring our other panelists into the conversation. And first turning to you, Jon. You've written about sort of the policy change that we've experienced in the United States. You actually were prescient in advocating for the case for gay marriage, which at the time was still a highly contested issue and may still be a highly contested issue, unfortunately, in this country today. I wonder if you can kind of speak to this issue of how the prevalence of many individuals who were gays or lesbians serving in senior positions helped contribute to policy change on some of the key issues that affect the daily lives of all Americans.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you, Suzanne. Thank you, everybody. The main reason I am here today is to tell everybody that his book is a capital M, masterpiece. You'll be missing something not only important surfacing of history, but a great reading experience if you don't check it out. So, I hope you do.

And one of the reasons it's a masterpiece is this book is like the raising of the Titanic. A gigantic underwater section of American history of dozens and dozens of people, named individuals, so, not just generalities, who were at the core of American policy making for a period of 50, 60 years. Yet, at every moment were leading double lives. Were subject to instant ruin, vulnerable to manipulation, betrayed again and again. And to me, Suzanne, one of the things that comes out of this book is the extraordinary dedication of so many of these people who were working in the heart of government day in and day out because, in many cases, these were men, by the way. Because of the way the world was in the '50s and '60s, this is almost overwhelmingly about white gay males. Sorry, that's how the world was in the Eisenhower years.

These were often men who did not have family responsibilities like kids. And, of course, they couldn't marry, and their relationships were primarily out of sight and hidden. So, these were people who were working harder than other people in the government. They gave their lives to their country partly because it was their country, but partly also because this became the solid thing around which they could shape their life. And, of course, the tragedy is at any given moment, any of these people could be exposed and it would all burst like a soap bubble. Effectively their working lives would be over. They would be thrown under the bus by their boss. Ruthlessly, completely cut off. And they all knew it that it could happen at any given moment. Yet, they soldiered on.

So, to me, one of the most moving things about the book is its resurfacing of those invisible lives. And those, we can say it, I think, to some extent, Jamie, right? Invisible heroes?

MR. KIRCHICK: Fair, yeah.

MS. MALONEY: Luke, I would love to hear your perspective on all of this. One of the topics that Jamie writes about in the book is the role of the Mattachine Society, which was an early gay rights organization. You now lead an organization that helps to advocate for individuals who serve in national security positions, and more widely, in the government. What is the kind of balance between the kind of change from within that happens simply as a result of individuals serving their country with

distinction and helping to change views and create a greater culture of openness and acceptance. And the role of these organizations, such as yours, such as the Mattachine Society in making the workplace more tolerant and more diverse.

MR. SCHLEUSENER: Well, that's a great question. First of all, thrilled to be here with all of you. I've been reading Jamie and Jonathan, I think, longer than I've had a career in public service. So, it's wonderful to share a stage with them.

In terms of that question, a couple of different things. Change comes both from the bottom up and then top down. And it's flattering to be told that the organization is in line with the Mattachine Society. I'm thrilled to, you know, share something with, of all people, Harry Hay. And it's important to remember that most change for gay rights in the country have come out of people who have served in national security.

If you've read Allan Berube's "Coming Out Under Fire," you understand that, you know, the first wave of gay rights activists and then people more famous have come out of serving together in World War II where they do the important thing. They find each other, they dance, they play cards, and they conspire for civil rights, which is where Mattachine came from. It's where Daughters of Bilitis came from. And, you know, where democracy and the government should look like us.

The downside is lots and lots of people had to make sacrifices whether during the War on Terror before to make a more equitable world. And, you know, this kind of service, government service, public service, and service in national security is hotly contested because once it's plausible to be openly gay, and to be publicly trusted with the nation's secrets, it is impossible to deny the other key in critical rights when it comes to marriage, when it comes to civil rights protections, when it comes to things of that nature.

MR. KIRCHICK: That's actually a really good point. I hadn't thought of before because gay people were explicitly prohibited from holding a security clearance from 1953 until 1995, when Bill Clinton lifted the ban. And most people don't realize that when I tell them that gay people could not have a security clearance until 1995.

And I think that that moment in 1995 is probably underappreciated for the point that you say, which is once you're entrusting someone with the nuclear codes, right, the proverbial nuclear codes

or what have you, it's hard to deny those people other rights, right? If you're entrusting them with secrets of the state, what is the case for discriminating against them in other realms? And so, I think one of the things I learned in this book was just how much sort of the realm of national security impacted this issue of homosexuality in America.

Because it was another paradoxical point was that World War II, while being this amazing moment in sort of raising gay consciousness, you have all these gay people from rural areas they're all kind of thrust together for the first time because of the mass mobilization in the military. It was a major moment, I think, in gay American history. It also happened to be paradoxically the moment when the military instituted its ban on gay people, was with World War II. Not many of them were actually prohibited because the military basically needed any warm body it could get. But that's when the ban on gay people serving in the military began was with World War II.

MS. MALONEY: We're now in a situation where probably one of the most prominent contenders for a future democratic presidential run is a gay man. He's widely popular, very successful in his prior run for president, serving with distinction as a cabinet official today. How much change have we experienced? How much further do we have to go?

MR. KIRCHICK: It came as a shock to me, Pete -- I'm assuming you're talking about Pete Buttigieg. It certainly came as a surprise to me, his assent, and his popularity. And also, the lack of his sexual orientation being an issue. Granted, you know, if he had been the nominee and was running against Donald Trump, I'm sure it would have become an issue in a nasty and ugly way. And if he were to secure the nomination at some point, I think in a general election it would be an issue.

But still, this was not something that was really a problem in the democratic primary. If anything, if probably helped him, I think. I think it sort of rose interest in him as a person, as a personality, as a historic figure. And I think it was just, I mean, I was sort of taken aback by his presence in American politics. But, Jon, to you.

MR. RAUCH: I'll add two things that surprised me, Suzanne, during the campaign in 2000. The first was Donald Trump because this, as we all know, is not a man who is reticent about going and punching back against his adversaries times 10. And he was punched again and again by gay and lesbian officialdom, accused of all kinds of things. We don't need to get into the merits of those

accusations. Yet, uncharacteristically, right through his presidency, Trump refused to punch back against gay people. And we still don't know why. But this was one of the areas where he seemed to have decided he was not going to go.

MR. KIRCHICK: He's a big Elton John fan.

MR. RAUCH: He --

MR. KIRCHICK: So, that might be.

MR. RAUCH: -- he did -- yeah, I don't know. He did punch out very much against trans people, but not gay people. And to me, that was something of a turning point because that was a signal to the rest of the Republican Party that we don't need to go here and we're not going there anymore. Now, some will, of course. But Trump validated acceptance of homosexuality in politics in a way that I think no prior president had done. I'll be curious if Jamie agrees.

The second thing that surprised me and disappointed me was the number of people in the so-called queer community who did go after Pete Buttigieg and accused him of being a white male homosexual and not queer enough, and yesterday's newspaper, and in some sense, a betrayal of the community. And for a gay man of my generation, that was disappointing and counterproductive to say the least. So, you tell me how those vectors make sense.

MR. SCHLEUSENER: In my case, it wasn't particularly surprising because you, you know, you have a detail into the War on Terror, a gay man who served in the Navy Reserves, who is eminently plausible in biography, right? So, Rhodes Scholar, Harvard. It would have been more surprising if it was a, you know, a gay man who had gone to the University of Colorado and become governor. And, of course, Jared Polis is now governor of Colorado. And so, it made sense in the arch of respectability politics and what Jonathan highlights, which is the push/pull of, you know, integration assimilationism versus queer separatism. And, you know, how that is played out and fluctuated within the community and the way that interacts with American politics.

Some of that has shifted, you know, from the end of the Stonewall uprising to AIDS, and to after the AIDS crisis, and prioritizing marriage over perhaps more separatism or other kinds of civil rights. As to whether or not Donald Trump was particularly kinder to queer people, I tend to view the Trump presidency grimly. You know, it is an organization of resentments that have been curated for

years by that party.

So, the Federalist Society stacked the bench with people who are interested in, for example, like the judge in Texas deciding that PrEP is not necessary to be provided to people. As if HIV would be exempt from regulation because the Christian commitment to hurting gays is that important. We have a Supreme Court majority which will pose a threat for the next 40 years or so to things like marriage equality, employment, things of that nature. And we have a Republican Party in alliance with things like Libs of TikTok, which, you know, whips up stochastic terrorism and political violence.

So, you know, Boston's Children Hospital which provides gender affirming care had to close down because of bomb threats. Armed people are showing up at drag queen story hours or anywhere gay people are accepted. And so, I don't think we're at a newer, cuddlier phase of the Republican Party because it's just not there.

Would there be a Democratic nominee who is gay or lesbian, of course, there's also Senator Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin. I'm sure the Republican Party would be unkind. And if you spend any time near Fox News or the broader internet, they are particularly animated by Pete Buttigieg's sexual orientation. They say dreadful things about him when it comes to him having a family and things like paternity leave. It's just how much of the internet you want to pay attention to and how much you want to weigh that in the current moment.

MS. MALONEY: Jamie, I want to come back to you on this point, the kind of situation that we face as a country today. One of the points from your book is that I think you said that the federal bureaucracy was in some ways advanced. I mean, it's hard to, you know, read the really difficult experiences that you talk about of various individuals in public service and appreciate that. But in fact, the fact that, you know, since 1975, there have been, you know, sort of the federal public service has enabled gays and lesbians to serve openly. And that there has been this, you know, sort of number of people in very senior positions over the years that in a sense, there -- Washington has been in some ways ahead of the rest of the country and helped to advance the cause of civil rights in some respects even as other parts of the country were still very much in a backward situation.

That dichotomy seems like it's getting even worse today. That we will have parts of the country in which the legal framework is so discriminatory toward gays and lesbians and other queer

people. Whereas, the federal government at least as long as we have a democratic president is leaning into these rights and trying to preserve the space for individuals to serve their country. So, how do we make sense of this? How can we make progress if, in fact, we have these kinds of threats at the state level even if the federal government remains a refuge?

MR. KIRCHICK: That's a good question. Maybe I'm a little too optimistic. But I'm not as concerned about the right to marriage equality being revoked. I guess because people are raising concerns because of the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. If you read the ruling majority opinion, the justices go out of their way to state that their legal reasoning for doing this, for overturning *Roe v. Wade* should not apply to any other case. And they specifically mention the gay marriage decisions. It's only Justice Thomas' concurring opinion that raises the specter of potentially overturning gay marriage. I could be wrong about that, again.

But I also look at the polling numbers on this, which shows over 70 percent of Americans support gay marriage, marriage equality. Including for the first time as of last year, a majority of republicans support marriage equality. And the justices, I think, do take into consideration public opinion and whether or not it's shifted in terms of their opinions.

Abortion, unlike gay marriage, abortion has pretty much -- public opinion on abortion has really not changed much since 1973. Whereas, there's no other issue that's ever been polled in America that has seen a more dramatic shift in public opinion than on these questions of acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage. You talk to the people at Pew, or Gallup, or whatnot, they can't come up with another topic.

So, that makes me somewhat optimistic about this. Obviously, I mean, you could look at the worst-case scenario and look at Berlin in the 1920s, right? The sort of great place to be gay and then things went south. And I'm not making a direct comparison by any means. I'm just offering that example to say that you never know what the future holds. But I do think that there has been -- living in a country now where it seems we're so divided on so many issues. We're so polarized and so many books have been written about this. And there's lots of Brookings scholars who are studying polarization, and tribalism, and all these things

It does seem like on this question of sort of basic equality and fairness for gay people,

there is something of a consensus. It doesn't mean by any means that everyone agrees with this. But it does, you know, Jon was pointing this out, I think, with sort of the way that Trump handled this issue. I don't think opposition to homosexuality was an animating factor in sort of Trumpism or the right in a way that it was, you know, in 2004, right, when President George W. Bush really motivated voters with this attempt to ban gay marriage.

It seems to me like this issue of gay rights, the acceptance of homosexuality, it's not so salient an issue in American politics. I think the trans issue is becoming a very controversial subject. That's a separate, you know, I didn't write a book about that. So, I can't really offer my opinions on it. But I think when it comes to gay equality, I do think that we've reached a point where it's going to be very difficult to, you know, move backwards on that. Jon, I don't know if you have.

MR. RAUCH: Yeah, I agree. I think, you know, we need to be able to walk and chew gum. And Luke, of course, you know, you're right that there are plenty of vulnerabilities on the horizon. But I think we passed a turning point where it's going to be very difficult for national politicians, at least, to beat up on homosexuals for political benefit. There will always be some under the radar stuff and there's always going to be some controversies. But, you know, if you look at the Supreme Court, I don't know about Justices Alito and Thomas, the older guys, but I am pretty certain that Roberts, Kavanaugh, Coney Barrett, and Gorsuch harbor no animus toward gay people.

And if they do rule against, for example, gay marriage, it might happen, I don't think it will be on anti-gay grounds. I think it will be on other grounds and they will invite Congress, for example, to step in and legislate gay marriage. Or they'll look for other grounds than the ones that were used in Obergefell to establish gay marriage. And, in fact, Thomas hinted at that in his concurrence in Dobbs.

So, I think we just -- we need to accept the good news that the world has really changed even though, you know, for homosexual men and women, life will never be as easy as it is for everyone else. But to me, one of the miracles of reading Jamie's book is I lived through those years. I was born in 1960. It was illegal for people like me to work in the government. Until I was 15, it was we were criminals in most states in the union for most of my childhood. People like me were mentally ill until I was 13.

And I knew all that. I didn't know the details, but I did everything I possibly could to bury, even from myself, the truth about myself until well into my 20s because I did not want to have to live the

life that entailed that kind of discrimination. I didn't want to be packed off to the funny farm, or the looney bin, or psychiatric care. I wanted to have a future and marriage. I wanted to be able to serve in the government and I knew all of those things were out of reach. And I have to tell you, for better or for worse, I think really for better, young people today they barely have any idea that any of those things really happened.

MS. MALONEY: One of the benefits of being of our generation that we have seen such amazing progress. And I'm reassured to hear at least from some perspective that you think that progress can be sustained and preserved and built upon. And there I wanted to perhaps bring Luke back into the conversation. And just ask your views, and really the entire panel, on what it is that our current leaders can learn from the experiences that Jamie writes about in this book. From the progress that has been made from the costs that discrimination imposed on our society and on our national security. What are the sorts of advances that we should be pressing leaders at every level, but especially in the federal bureaucracy to ensure that people of all sexual orientation, of all gender identity, of all race, ethnicity, and religions can serve their country without fear of discrimination or fear of backlash with their personal identities in any way connected to their work?

MR. SCHLEUSENER: Oh geez, that's a good question. First, I'm going to sort of loop back on the question of whether or not marriage is safe. I would point out that John Roberts' dissent in Obergefell is remarkably angry and it is a point of concern for everyone who apparently can't distinguish between marriage as a civil union and as a religious institution. And that Alito and Thomas have both expressed interest in getting a case that would let them chip away at the Fourteenth Amendment penumbra that both derives not only to Roe and Griswold before it, but all of the marriage equality stuff. The idea that citizens have a right to privacy from the government. That, you know, to paraphrase our Canadian friends to the north, government should be small enough to fit in the bedrooms of the nation and, you know, into people's private lives.

And so, I'm weary about this. And there's lots of ways to damage marriage equality without overturning it. I mean, you know, John Roberts said the Voting Rights Act was safe and then we got Shelby County. So, you can do a lot of stuff to harm a lot of people and, you know, the alternative Republican hopeful to Donald Trump is a gentleman named Ron DeSantis, who is passing bills straight

out of the 1970s when it comes to "Don't Say Gay," which is like the Briggs Initiative in California, and doing all sorts of other things when it comes to stigmatizing queer people and driving them out of democratic space.

In terms of what we should ask for is you should have a much more aggressive federal government when the states are in the grips of backlash. And not only backlash, but backlash targeted towards specific groups whether or not it's African Americans who are voting, or women, or anything of that nature. You know, Lincoln says, I'm clothed in the mighty power of the federal government, use it. So, for example, you could if you're the Department of Defense, respond to the various states that now 26 of them, have made it harder to have a transgender dependent, to be nonbinary, or have stripped away various civil rights protections.

You can say, cool, that's great. Here's base realignment and closure. You know, we are no longer keeping the Air Force War College in Alabama. We're moving it to Washington State because everyone is safe there. You can do things through press, through the EEOC, and the Department of Justice, and the Department of Education. There are a majority of republican states' attorney general who want to be able to deny free lunch to queer identified children. Federal government should push back on that, use the Commerce Clause.

Because, you know, the U.S. and the world learning from all of these people and their lives in national security and beyond, needs to be able to say in an era where there are reactionary movements in France, in Germany, the new right-wing government in Italy, as well as Russia and China, who are profoundly homophobic and profoundly authoritarian. Not as a liberal democracy, our killer app is that we can in fact rely on all American talents and all American people. And we should be promoting gay rights at home and abroad relentlessly the same way that during the civil rights movement, we not only promoted the Apollo program because we have great technology, we promoted civil rights progress because as a free and open society we are better off when everyone can be part of the government and when there is accountability for harassment, discrimination, and cruelty.

MR. RAUCH: Just a footnote. Maybe people may not know what the Briggs Initiative, which we've just referred to is. In 1978, conservatives in California put on the ballot a proposition that would have fired all homosexual teachers. The person who stopped that from happening was one

Ronald Reagan. I don't approve of what Governor DeSantis has done in Florida with the bills that would bar the teaching of sexual orientation or transgender or what is it called?

MR. KIRCHICK: Gender ideology.

MR. RAUCH: Gender ideology third grade and lower. But it's a serious historical misprision to compare that to an initiative that would fire all homosexual teachers in an entire state. So, I think we do have to recognize these important differences.

And, Luke, you're certainly right that there's a long road ahead on gender and trans issues. And we're just at the beginning of that. And it's important to distinguish as I have tried to do between transgender equality and radical gender ideology and some of the other things that are circulating. The public is just starting to get to grips on this. So, we're kind of with that debate where we were, I don't know, Jamie, would you say in the '70s?

MR. KIRCHICK: Yeah, it's fair. That's a fair comparison, yeah.

MR. RAUCH: So, this is a different -- this is the next stage and it's something else. It's something different. And we're just entering it. And, yes, you're completely right, Luke. That is going to be a long and sometimes painful road.

MS. MALONEY: I'd like to come back to an issue that Luke just touched upon, which is the kind of relationship between public service for individuals, between civil rights for all people in America, and our foreign policy. And, you know, we had a question and I'm going to start bringing in questions from the audience both here in the room, as well as some of our virtual viewers. A question from Brian Davis from the U.S. Department of State asking about, you know, the sort of policies that -- the discriminatory policies that were in place for so long, can you speak to some of the implications for our national security? How did it endanger us that we were essentially making criminalizing and penalizing individuals who wanted to serve this country. And if you or anyone on the panel wants to say another word about what we can and should be doing now to advance the cause of equality abroad, I think that would also be very welcome.

MR. KIRCHICK: Yeah, I think the book documents the massive human toll of these policies. And I document them through individual stories, which are very painful. We're talking about in the 1950s alone, it's been estimated that 7,000 to 10,000 people lost their jobs because of they were gay

or merely they were suspected of being gay. That's a number that is probably parallel to, if not higher, than the number of people who lost their jobs because they were accused of being communists or having left-wing sympathies, right?

And so, we all know about the Red Scare and there's lots of movies and television shows and books and it's something we all learn about in school, the Red Scare. We don't learn about the Lavender Scare, right, the Cold War era persecution of gay people. So, there's a lot of individual lives that were ruined, a lot of talent. People like Jon who didn't even consider serving their country because they knew that they would be putting themselves at risk.

Something else I discovered while researching this book was just what I called the specter of homosexuality and how it terrorized this city and obsessed people. And something, a recurring pattern that I discovered in my research was that pretty much any -- whatever the great evil was of the day that the country was confronting, it would somehow be sort of associated with homosexuality. So, you know, Nazism and fascism.

I came across multiple government documents, senior government officials speculating at length about how the Nazis were sort of a gay cabal. There's actually one proposal that I came across very early into World War II, just weeks after Pearl Harbor, it came across the desk of the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor to the CIA, there was a proposal made to them saying that because the Nazis are so, you know, infested with homosexuals, perhaps you should consider recruiting patriotic homosexuals to go over and infiltrate the Nazi high command, right?

And this was something. And there are two OSS reports on the psychology of Adolf Hitler, and they speculate at length, you know, is Hitler a homosexual? He's surrounding himself with all these handsome men. You know, homosexuals are more naturally attracted to fascism than other people. I mean, this was something that was -- we roll our eyes at this today. But this was something that was seriously considered.

And then just a couple years later when the Cold War begins, now all of sudden gays are communists, right? And McCarthy just, you know, Joe McCarthy, just a couple weeks after he gives that famous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia where he has the list in his hands of 205 communists. In the State Department, Dean Atkinson, the secretary of state, was called up to testify on Capitol Hill. And in

passing, one of his deputy undersecretaries is testifying, and just in passing mentions that 91 homosexuals have been fired from the State Department over the previous three years. That kicks off the Lavender Scare and this conflation of homosexuality in communism begins.

I tell the story of Jim Garrison, the really irresponsible, reckless prosecutor in New Orleans who in 1967, accused a gay man, Clay Shaw, of being at the center of a right-wing homosexual plot to kill John F. Kennedy. If you've seen the movie, *JFK*, a very famous movie by Oliver Stone, this is what that movie is about. It's about what Jim Garrison referred to as a homosexual thrill killing. Okay. The only man, the only person ever prosecuted for the Kennedy assassination was a gay man who was specifically targeted for being gay.

So, I just, it was this -- Washington was in the grip of this irrational fear of gay people. And if there's a lesson from my book, what I want people to take from it is the importance of open inquiry and freedom of expression because the reason why people had these views -- and by the way, these were bipartisan, okay? The democrats were no better. Liberals and progressives and democrats were no better on this issue than right-wing conservatives. Really until the 1970s, that's really, you know, prior to that gay people had no allies politically.

How we got from that dark period in our history to where we are today was because we were allowed to actually discuss these issues. And most important was that gay people could themselves come out and be real and show the world that they were not fascists, and communists, and assassins, and all these terrible awful things that we used to attribute to gay people. Because they lived in secret. They lived secret lives.

MS. MALONEY: I'd like to open up to questions in the audience. Please indicate if you would like the mike by raising your hand and we will get a mic to you. Perhaps, here we go just to the right. And I will still bring in additional questions from our virtual audience. So, keep those coming via Twitter or to events@brookings.edu.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I'm a native Floridian. In Florida in the '50s we had the Johns Committee, which was a legislative inquiry into communist sympathizers in Florida, as well as into LGBTQ professionals working for the state. I was curious if you saw any legislative inquiries or boondoggles at the federal level during that time? Or if it was just all of the oxygen in the room was sort of eaten up by

the Red Scare?

MR. KIRCHICK: Well, absolutely. The Lavender Scare, the government expended tremendous resources in hunting down, investigating, and dismissing gay people. And it was a government-wide initiative. And in fact, I'm a little embarrassed that we're 48 minutes into this talk and we haven't mentioned Frank Kameny, who is someone who is an important figure in my book. And I bring up his name because in 1957, Frank Kameny was a Harvard-trained Ph.D. astronomer, working for the Army Map Service, which is the predecessor to the Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

Two months after Sputnik is launched, right? This is the height of the space race. What does the federal government do? They fire a Harvard-trained Ph.D. astronomer because he's gay. And that illustrates how pervasive and how strong the effort was, how serious the government considered gay people to be a threat, right? That in like two months after Sputnik, the country is obsessed with this issue of being able to compete with the Soviets. The entire, you know, STEM category, right? It's created during those late years of the Eisenhower administration investing all this money into teaching students to pursue careers in science and technology and engineering is because of this exterior, external threat from the Soviet Union. And what is the government doing? They are tracking down Harvard-trained astronomers to fire them.

So, I think in that one example, you see how senseless and wasteful this effort was. And it's impossible for me to, you know, tell you, you know, what's the amount of money that we wasted or what was lost as a country. I think it's incalculable.

MR. RAUCH: Do you remember the seven Arabic translators --

MR. KIRCHICK: Right.

MR. RAUCH: -- who were fired for being gay --

MR. KIRCHICK: Yes.

MR. RAUCH: -- during the height of the Iraq War?

MR. KIRCHICK: Right. So, it went even beyond.

MR. RAUCH: This went well into my lifetime. This is not ancient history. My friends in the State Department recently, one of them recently retired, used to talk to me in the '80s and into the '90s about what they called the goon squad. And this was a unit of the State Department Security

Service, which was investigating and routing out homosexuals. And this went on and on well into the '90s. It didn't fully and completely end until to her everlasting credit, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shut it all down, made gay people welcome, and had an ambassador in Prague who projected the rainbow flag onto the embassy on Pride Day, much to the --

MR. KIRCHICK: Who happens to be a Brookings fellow.

MR. RAUCH: Happens to be a Brookings fellow --

MR. KIRCHICK: So, no minor.

MR. RAUCH: -- at the moment. So, it took until the Obama years to really put that behind us.

MR. KIRCHICK: And I will say, the Defense Department in the early '90s, when the gays in the military debate was happening, they commissioned a study to see were there any cases actually of gay people being blackmailed and giving information to a foreign power, right? Because this was the justification for this policy. And they studied about 105 cases of espionage over the course of American history. Six of the people happened to be gay. And not a single one of them did it because of blackmail, right? It was for the typical reasons, money, or ideology. So, there actually wasn't a single example of this in the history of the United States. And yet, all these efforts were expended on routing out this completely phantom threat.

And I think that actually makes the Lavender Scare a worse and more damaging phenomenon than the Red Scare. Because while the Red Scare was clearly unjustified, it was not based on a completely unjustifiable premise. I mean, communism was a threat to this country. And there were a number of quite high-ranking people in the federal government in the 1940s and early 1950s who were communists. Alger Hiss, who I write about at length in the book. So, there was a need and there was a reason to be fearful of communism. It was obviously just demagogued and exaggerated. Whereas, the fear of gay people was completely unjustified, completely.

MS. MALONEY: Luke, I wondered if you wanted to comment on this conversation from the perspective of having served in the federal government during the period of some of this dramatic change.

MR. SCHLEUSENER: Sure. You know, first of all I would say that Jamie's right. That

the losses here are incalculable. You have the people who were driven out of public service. The people who, the goon squad and their counterparts across the federal government drove to suicide in large numbers because of the social opprobrium. I would also say that, you know, when I became interested in public service, I was in high school. It was, you know, we are just passed the 21st anniversary of 9/11.

And, you know, I was the thing you would want for a service academy. I was a straight-A student. I was a multi-sport athlete. Took a look at West Point, thought about it. At that point I had come out and at that point I was not particularly interested in deciding between serving my country and being who I was. And I figured, you know, look I was taking half my classes at U-Chicago and I was at that point, I thought I wanted to be a classics major in languages. So, I switched to Arabic and Farsi and Hebrew. And in a universe where, you know, there weren't so many people committed to denying gay people citizenship, I probably would have joined.

But I remember the first job I had I interned for Senator Kennedy and at this point I knew no gay people in national security. There was nothing to find on the internet. There were no books. I think I did a Google crawl and I found -- or I guess Google wasn't there yet, so, Yahoo. And I found Walter Jenkins, who was LBJ's White House Chief of Staff who got caught having sex in the YMCA. That's a couple blocks from here and is now gone. I found, of course, Sumner Welles. And I found a sailor who'd been beaten to death for being gay.

So, took a look. Thought, well, national security isn't for me. Floated briefly with the State Department. Floated briefly with the CIA because I got a bunch of money to go learn Arabic abroad. And, you know, it was basically do the hard thing anyway because characterologically that's how I'm built. But there were lots of different barriers thrown up. I was lucky because Kennedy's office had a ton of gay men, including Jay Maroney, who was then his new advisor. So, I got the clear message that I belonged early and often.

And I also understood that, you know, being born into immense privilege, you know, nice middle-class parents, nice middle-class education. Go do the hard thing and I understood that the Pentagon, more than the State Department, if I could get there, would be in some sense a prize. Because the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, to me, signaled the window for progress. But also going to the Pentagon is stepping back in time. It's a period where, you know, the Pentagon didn't know there

were gay people who could do national security or didn't know they knew tons of them.

So, it requires consistent individual sacrifice for the greater good. And can also be stressful and frankly, intolerable as society decides to backlash, snap back, or have pity parties about what they think is a citizen versus who is a citizen. And I think the hangover of what came before me is, you know, not only a sign that it is unwelcome, but the state will organize bureaucratic violence and that the state will support additional layers of violence, right? So, you have plenty of gay veterans who, you know, starting in 1916 going forward, were stripped out of the benefits we promise people who serve the country, breaking the democratic compact, and on and on.

So, you know, I came anyway, but think about all of my friends and colleagues who chose not to. Who did domestic policy. Who left the policy world entirely. I have friends who chose comedy over public service because it was less socially humiliating. It's, you know, it's a long hangover. And I think this is why the U.S. should follow its partners and allies in establishing a purge fund to recognize and compensate people and guide the federal government towards better policies.

MR. RAUCH: Yeah, I agree with that. We should be looking at restitution for the actual human victims of these policies. You know, not going back through history forever, but the people who were victimized by these policies, many of them are alive and walking around. And they should get some kind of restitution, if only symbolic.

MS. MALONEY: And a question here in the front row and then I want to pull in one more question from our virtual audience as well.

SPEAKER: I have a question. In the U.K., Allan Turing, the code breaker got apology a few years ago. Is that something you would see happening in the U.S. or that you would want to happen?

MR. KIRCHICK: I know I believe John Kerry when he was Secretary of State issued a formal apology for the State Department's purge of gays. There's also a bill in Congress being cosponsored by David Cicilline from Rhode Island that would seek to launch a study, I believe, of like an official government account of the Lavender Scare and the victims and issue a report. And also, to explore the idea of issuing recompense and having a formal U.S. Government sort of apology or recognition of these policies. So, it is something that I think we should be pursuing.

MR. RAUCH: Yes, we should.

MR. KIRCHICK: Sorry. Luke, go ahead.

MR. SCHLEUSENER: We absolutely should. And I worked on this when I was at the Department of Defense. The biggest part -- the biggest question for the American Government is does the apology then generate specific legal liability and different frames of compensation? Which is why, you know, when I worked with Cicilline, when I worked with Representative Castro's office, and others on the Love Act, for example, which is the bill Jamie is discussing there. The interest has always been pairing an apology with monetary compensation and, you know, advisory boards going forward to make the government better. But, yes, absolutely the federal government should apologize. You're talking about let's arbitrarily say tens of thousands of people.

The Pentagon itself directly employs one in every 100 Americans, and one in five of those is probably LGBT in some sense. We know that trans people and gay men and lesbians in different numbers oversubscribe to military service, for example. So, there's a large pool of victims or people who were mistreated by the government who need to be apologized to. Downside is the federal government is, you know, there's 17 intelligence agencies. There's multiple executive departments and each of those is going to have a different cultural response to being told it's time to apologize and it's time to apologize with money.

On the other hand, the federal government has done this for, you know, all sorts of things including environmental contamination. Department of Agriculture discrimination, for example, though that is still tied up. So, it's not an unfamiliar frame. But it should be money and an apology because that will draw a cultural and political line under this kind of behavior and make it harder to revert, which is otherwise possible.

MS. MALONEY: We are close to the end of our time here together. I want to throw out one final question that was posed by R. G. Epler from USAID asking about the kind of implications of this period that you study in your book on life in Washington for gay people. And then ask you to speak to that just for a moment and then a few closing thoughts.

MR. KIRCHICK: Well, I think Washington is a sort of paradoxical city. In that for much of its history, the history that I describe in the book, it was both the gayest city in many ways because gay

people were attracted to work here for the reasons that Jon and Luke talked about. It was also the anti-gayest city in America at the same time. Which, you know, for a place that thrives on hypocrisy, as Washington does, not to be too cynical, is sort of appropriate, actually.

But it's not that anymore. And now, Washington ranks as I believe the gayest city per capita in the United States. So, the gayest state per capita in the United States. And so, I think that kind of illustrates the strange paradoxical nature of this place when it's come to this issue.

MS. MALONEY: That seems like an appropriate place to close. I just want to say at the end I think the word masterpiece has been used a number of times both in reviews as well as in Jonathan's remarks. It's absolutely true. This is a very important book. For whatever you might be interested in understanding about American politics, about American foreign policy, about the history of our country and the future of our country, I highly recommend this book.

It is exactly what we try to produce at Brookings. Very serious, deeply researched, impartial, objective work that has an enormous impact on both policy decisions and public debate. So, I want to thank Jamie Kirchick for writing it. Thank him for being here today. Thank Jon and Luke for joining us. And thank all of you for tuning in to this very important conversation.

Thanks so much and look forward to seeing you all soon.

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